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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MUSCAT 001004

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP (S. STEINGER), NEA/PPD (DBENZE)  
STATE FOR ECA/PE/V/R/N, DRL (J. DEMARIA)  
STATE ALSO FOR G/TIP (G. PATEL AND M. TAYLOR)  
ABU DHABI FOR W. WALLRAPP AND B. ADADA  
AMMAN FOR J. IRVINE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INSIDE OMANI DEPORTATION CENTER, SEEKING  
RECIPROCAL VISIT

REF: 05 MUSCAT 1050

1. This is an action request for ECA, DRL, and G/TIP; please  
see paragraph 11.

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SUMMARY  
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2. (U) A June 19 visit to one of Oman's largest deportation centers revealed a clean and well-organized facility, and included a tour of the arrivals processing rooms, sleeping quarters, interview rooms, and kitchen facilities. Detainees receive medical attention upon arrival, weekly visits by local physicians, regular access to embassy representatives, and three meals a day. Seeking to strengthen their processing and handling of the over 10,000 illegal migrants apprehended every year, the Government of Oman has requested that the Embassy facilitate a reciprocal visit to a U.S. deportation facility. End summary.

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Embassy Granted First Visit to Deportation Facility  
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3. (U) After a long-standing request to visit one of Oman's deportation facilities (reftel), the government of Oman invited PolOff to visit its largest deportation center located in Sohar on June 19. The Sohar deportation center is one of two centers in Oman (the other is located at the other end of the country in Salalah) and it is estimated that over 400 Pakistanis and other nationals are detained and deported from here every month. (Note: According to officials, no women or children have ever been detained. Moreover, given the high cost of passage from Iran - approximately \$300 USD per person - women and children are unlikely to have the necessary funds or be allowed to travel from their respective home countries. End Note.) No international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or embassy personnel without detained citizens have ever requested to visit the facility. The first visit of its kind, PolOff was accompanied by the Public Relations Director of the Royal Oman Police. The visit lasted about one hour and included a tour of the arrivals processing rooms, sleeping quarters, embassy interview rooms, and kitchen facilities. In whole, the facility, opened just four years ago, appeared neat, clean and well-organized.

4. (U) According to Royal Oman Police officers (ROP) who run the facility, illegal migrants arriving by boat along the Iran-facing Batinah coast are apprehended, interviewed at local police stations, and then brought to the detention facility where they are fingerprinted and photographed. (Note: Interviews at local police stations include detailed questioning to determine the detainee's place of origin, method of travel, and information that may lead to human smuggling convictions for the apprehended boat captains. End Note.) Fingerprints allow the ROP to determine if the illegal migrant has been detained before; in which case, a criminal case may be filed. It is estimated that less than 10 percent of the apprehended detainees are repeat offenders. Upon arrival at the center, each detainee receives an initial medical check by a physician from the Sohar Central Hospital. The Ministry of Health also sponsors weekly visits by a local physician. Although detainees' respective embassies are notified within two to three days of their arrival at the center, detainees can remain there anywhere from three days to several weeks as they await interviewing by their respective embassy representative (usually the Labor Attache) and eventual repatriation.

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Deportation Center Appears to Meet High Standards  
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15. (U) The deportation facility itself is a large, nondescript square compound visible from the main road and within a mile of the town center. Within the exterior wall there are two separate sections, each made up of six rectangular-shaped rooms. Detainees are housed by nationality. Each room is approximately 30 feet by 60 feet and can easily accommodate up to forty persons. The rooms are sparse, but appeared to have plenty of blankets and pillows, as well as showers and toilets behind a privacy wall along the back. There is also cold drinking water and six ceiling fans in each room. According to officers running the facility, the detainees are provided two hours of exercise each day and are given reading materials, cards, and a copy of the Quran if they are Muslim.

16. (U) On the day of the visit, detainees at the center included 127 Pakistanis (which constitute 40.7 percent of all illegal migrants detained), 60 Iranians, 30 Afghans, 20 Bangladeshis, and 4 Indians. The center is also holding 23 foreign nationals who violated the terms of their work visas; the Ministry of Manpower arranges their disposition and transportation separately from the illegal migrants.

17. (U) Maintaining the center is a costly operation. On foodstuffs alone, it is estimated that the Omani government spends about \$21 USD per day per detainee (almost \$250,000 USD a year). A tour of the kitchen facilities confirmed the limited availability of fruit and vegetables, but menus featured abundant meat, chicken and fish.

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Repatriation  
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18. (U) Once embassy representatives have interviewed the detainees and ascertained their true place of origin, including village and road, return travel documents are issued. Detainees are bussed to the nearest seaport in Muscat and transported home via vessels provided by their home countries. Cognizant of recent ferry disasters in the region, ROP officials were firm in their rejoinder that boats are only loaded per their capacity, no more. (Note: Pakistani media have been critical of the crowding on Pakistani ships. End note.) In addition to sea travel, some individuals receive plane tickets home from charitable groups or acquaintances. Moreover, the Omani government provides air travel for anyone with medical problems or other conditions unsuitable for sea travel.

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Anti-TIP Actions  
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19. (U) Seeking to strengthen processing and handling of the over 10,000 illegal migrants apprehended every year, the Government of Oman has requested that the Embassy facilitate a reciprocal visit to a U.S. deportation facility. The Omani request is directly relevant to the 2006 Trafficking in Persons report on the Sultanate, which recommended that Oman "develop and deploy a more comprehensive screening procedure to ensure that any (trafficking) victims are identified and provided with appropriate protection services."

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Comment  
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110. (SBU) This visit to the Sohar deportation center was an opportunity to gain a first-hand account of ROP operations, facility conditions, and procedures for screening possible victims of trafficking. While disturbed by the allegations published in the Department's recent TIP Report, the Omani government sought to reassure Embassy officials of the fair and humane treatment of illegal migrants. In addition to visiting the deportation facility in Sohar, the Embassy has requested a visit to the other deportation center in Salalah.

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Action Request  
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11. (U) The Embassy requests the Department's facilitation of the Omani request to visit a U.S. deportation facility and consult with immigration and anti-trafficking officials in the United States. The Royal Oman Police would like to send up to six officers to learn more about international techniques in processing illegal migrants and victims of human trafficking, as well as to observe U.S. Customs and Border Protection processes, including interviewing, investigation, and deportation.

GRAPPO